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# Alberto Bayo: the Spanish legionary who was a hero of the Second Republic and trained Fidel Castro

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Alberto Bayo Giroud lived, at the very least, at breakneck speed. Dedicated from his adolescence to the military world, he witnessed the combats that the Spanish army (and the Legion, with which he fought) maintained against the Rifeños in North Africa; He sailed the skies as a pilot when the peninsular aviation first lifted its feet off the ground or, among many other things, was under the command of the controversial Lluís

Company before his coup attempt. However, he is best remembered for having become a guerilla teacher during the Civil War and, shortly after, for having trained Fidel Castro and his bearded men (including Che Guevara) to overthrow Fulgencio Batista.

It is striking that this character, curious beyond political identities, has now been forgotten in Spain and is remembered most in Cuba. Although in part it makes sense, since Castro himself referred to him as “the Master” and, for his part, Che Guevara defined him as “a gladiator who is not resigned to being old.” For them, he was a teacher who instructed his men in the art of the guerrilla.

Although in practice he only gave them a six-month course before the revolution began, in one of the many books he wrote (“150 questions to a guerrilla fighter”), this controversial Spaniard was proud to have collaborated with the man who he clung to the easy chair in Havana throughout his life: “Yes, I have personally trained the guerrilla leaders of Calixto Sánchez.”

### Early years

But let's go by parts. The academic Emilio Montero Herrero affirms, in an article prepared for the Royal Academy of History, that Bayo was born in the Spanish Port-au-Prince on March 27, 1892. About seven years before the Empire cracked with the loss of the colonies. Son of an artillery colonel, he marched with his family to Barcelona first, and to the United States later, to train. His path in military life began at fifteen springs, and it was brilliant. The tenacity led him, successively, to the Gran Canaria Regiment, the Toledo Infantry Academy and the Gerona 55 Regiment.

The first great step was taken in 1916, when he followed in the footsteps of his brother – who died in a tragic plane crash in the service of the army – and traveled to Madrid to become a pilot in the brand new Military Aviation of our country. A risk at the time, as we were still taking the first steps when it comes to flying the skies. In the following years he went through as many units until, after the conflict in the Rif flared up, he was

sent to North Africa to help stifle local cabilas. I did not know that it entered the wolf's mouth and one of the toughest contests in our country.

Among the most unknown deeds of Bayo are those that he carried out in Africa as part of The Legion since 1924. In this unit, formed to fight on the front line against the Rifeños, he came to be under the command of Francisco Franco, his nemesis years later. The future Republican officer, like so many of his colleagues who remained loyal to the government, fought in Africa and led a company for two years. Until 1925 to be more specific, when he was seriously injured and was forced to stay in bed for twelve months to fully recover. And all this, while helping to advance the country's aeronautics.

He left Africa with the 1st Class Military Merit Cross with a red badge and with the Cross of Maria Cristina after passing through an infinity of other units. And not only that, but he was soaked in the guerrilla techniques of Rife. Shortly afterwards he directed his steps to Barcelona, where he became an assistant to General Domingo Batet. He was in those when, on July 18, 1936, the National side rose against the Second Republic and the fratricidal conflict began in our country.

### Guerilla master

At the beginning of the Civil War, Bayo was commissioned to lead, nothing more and nothing less, than the amphibious invasion of Mallorca and Ibiza, where the coup had triumphed. That no one was a nobody to the Government is demonstrated by the fact that he led 6,000 men in this operation, a cruiser, a battleship, several seaplanes and many other smaller units. «In August he led the expedition. He conquered Ibiza and Formentera, but failed in Mallorca due to the Italian bombings, "explains Alfonso López García, a journalism doctor and author of" Saboteurs and guerrillas. Franco's nightmare in the Civil War »(one of the few works that exist on these units in Spain).

In López García's words, during the war our protagonist stood out as a fervent follower of the tactics he had learned in Africa. «He published a manual," 150 questions to a guerrilla fighter ", which he used during his time as a teacher at the Benimàmet guerrilla

school in Valencia, starting in 1937. The center helped to professionalize these fighters through orientation training, explosives , medicine ... », completes the expert.

Bayo, despite not fighting behind the enemy lines, specialized in the art of hitting the enemy's weakest points; something that our ancestors had already done when Napoleon Bonaparte's French army invaded the heart of the Peninsula.

With his help, the guerrillas became important in the Civil War. «During the confrontation, and for the first time in history, the guerrillas became part of an army corps (the XIV) thanks to their great effectiveness in demoralizing the enemy. Both he and the Republic understood that, although they could not change the sign of the fight, they did have the capacity to cause a lot of damage through express actions in the enemy field. That Franco made the decision to form his own guerrillas realized the importance they had and what they put their finger in his eye, "says López García.

What Bayo did during the Civil War were counter-espionage in southern France, in addition to participating in the Battle of Brunete. His actions earned him, at the end of the war, the rank of lieutenant colonel. In part, for his work with the guerrillas. "The reality is that, although their participation in the conflict was limited, the guerrillas were of brutal later importance. His inspiration served Britain and the United States to create their special action corps, the commandos. Also, when they returned to North America, members of the Lincoln Brigade were recruited to found the OSS, the germ of the CIA. It could be said that the influence of these units was seen in the long term ", concludes the author.

But all that knowledge did not prevent the Second Republic from being defeated by the National side and that this Cuban had to go into exile, back in 1939, to Mexico. "There he began his work as a guerrilla war advisor in 1947. His first job was to become a strategic affairs advisor to the Caribbean Legion, founded in Guatemala, and whose objective was to overthrow the regimes of Trujillo in the Dominican Republic and Somoza in Nicaragua ", López García ruling. This is how he began to become a true "guerrilla master".

## With Fidel and Che

When he was over sixty, Alberto Bayo had already written several books on guerrilla warfare. His fame did not go unnoticed by Fidel Castro. According to Reginaldo de Ustariz, Che's great biographer, in "Che Guevara, Life, Death and Resurrection of a Myth", was in 1955 when that young revolutionary who planned to strike a hand against the Batista government read the work of Spanish and proposed to train his inexperienced men. The objective: to convert an amateur force into an irregular one, but capable of fighting face to face against the professional army of Cuba.

Castro moved at full speed to Mexico, where Bayo ran a furniture store and, according to De Ustariz, used all his skill with oratory to convince him to help him. The author collects the conversation they both had that day:

-My general, I have come to ask for your collaboration to bring down the army of Fulgencio Batista.

-How many men do you have?

Alberto Bayo

- At the moment I have few men, but shortly about a hundred expeditionaries will land in Cuba.

- I am very sorry not to be able to accept, I am an instructor of the Military Aviation School of this city; apart from that, I have a furniture factory that requires my competition.

-You are Cuban! He has an absolute duty to help his people bring down the bloody, corrupt, and thieving tyrant.

Castro was correct. During that conversation he introduced veiled references to his hatred for Francisco Franco to gain Bayo's confidence. Thus, until he won for the cause. In one of his later books, the Spanish confessed that, although he undertook a task that

seemed almost impossible, he felt a certain magnetism for Castro's cause, of which he was "intoxicated":

«That young man was telling me that he hoped to defeat Batista in a future landing that he was planning to carry out with men. "When I have them", and with boats "when I have money to buy them", because, at the time he was talking to me, he had no men or money ... Wasn't that a funny thing? Wasn't it a children's trick? What he was asking of me was my commitment to teach guerrilla tactics to his future soldiers when he had recruited them and when he had obtained the necessary money to feed, clothe and equip them, and to buy ships to transport them to Cuba. What business is that? I thought. This young man wants to move mountains with one hand. But what did it cost me to please him? Yes, I said ».

Castro and his guerrilla, in 1957 For the next six months, Bayo trained Castro's guerrillas. Among them, Che Guevara. He taught them, as he explained, to abandon habits such as taking a good shower, eating several times a day or brushing their teeth. For him, both the brush and the toothpaste were two luxury items. In turn, he showed them the basic rules for going behind enemy lines and stalking a much larger professional army.

Remember that the guerrillas never invite the enemy to fight, every good guerrilla must attack by surprise in skirmishes or ambushes. When the soldiers charge to repel the attack, the guerrillas must disappear ».

When the Cuban revolution triumphed, he praised his pupils.

«My heart was jumping in my chest, my students learned the lessons so well that now Fidel can teach me. I want to see Che Guevara, Camilo, Raulito so they can tell me how they managed to learn to fight in the cities because, I confess, I didn't teach them that.

The love was mutual. Castro, in addition to giving him various positions in the administration, always called him "the Master." For his part, Che wrote the following

about him:

«For me it is an honor to put these lines to the memories of a gladiator who is not resigned to being old. Of General Bayo, modern Quixote, who only fears death who does not let him see if his homeland is liberated, I can say that he is my teacher ». .

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